

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

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### Testimony

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STATEMENT OF  
JAMES PICKMAN  
PRESIDENT OF THE GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER CORPORATION  
BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
JULY 16, 1998

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 4109, a bill to authorize the Gateway Visitor Center at Independence National Historical Park (INHP) in Philadelphia. I am the president of the Gateway Visitor Center Corporation, a nonprofit, Section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to working in partnership with the National Park Service to develop and operate the proposed center. The Gateway Visitor Center, or GVC, is intended to serve as the primary visitor orientation facility for the national park, the surrounding historic district, the City of Philadelphia, and the greater metropolitan region. It will be located within INHP boundaries on Independence Mall, just north of Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. H.R. 4109 -- enacted on a timely basis -- is essential to the realization of this regional gateway mission.

In my statement this morning, I would like to describe briefly how the GVC was conceived by the National Park Service and other stakeholders, the partnership that will be responsible for the center's development and operation, the partnership's vision for the GVC, how the facility will be funded, and the critical need for H.R. 4109.

### Background

The concept of a regional visitor center on Independence Mall emerged from the convergence of two parallel explorations -- one conducted by the National Park Service and the other by The Pew Charitable Trust. Through its general management plan process begun in 1993 and completed in April 1997, the National Park Service (NPS) undertook a comprehensive review of the future management and use of INHP, with a focus on Independence Mall. This three block, 15-acre mall was created in the 1950's and 1960's through the demolition of over 140 buildings in order to provide an appropriate setting for Independence Hall and create a vibrant, public urban space. Unfortunately, these objectives have not been realized. The Park Service review and resulting plan, which received loud and clear public support, calls for a complete redoing of Independence Mall with the development of a new regional visitor orientation facility as a central element. Today's testimony by Destry Jarvis of the NPS provides greater detail on the Park Service's general management plan process and content.

At the same time as the Park Service was conducting its review, the Philadelphia-based Pew Charitable Trusts, one of the nation's largest philanthropies, concluded from a study it commissioned that greater

Philadelphia has been missing an opportunity for significant economic development by failing to cultivate its potential in the tourism industry. To address this need, the Trusts pursued two related objectives. The first -- increasing the marketing of the region's existing attractions -- resulted in the establishment of the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation, a \$12 million partnership among the Trusts, the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The second objective was to create a magnificent regional orientation facility on Independence Mall. The Trusts concluded that although INHP contains the most enduring of historical treasures, its existing visitor center is poorly located and is inadequate for accommodating and orienting significant numbers of people to the park and other city and regional attractions. And there was clear consensus among all interested parties that a new visitor center needed to be constructed right on the mall -- a location more accessible to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall (the leading attractions in the Philadelphia region), as well as to major travel arteries.

As a result of their similar conclusions, in the summer of 1995, the Trusts and NPS joined forces to explore together the feasibility of a new visitor orientation facility on Independence Mall. After a rigorous due diligence analysis that affirmed the center's feasibility, the Pew Trusts, with NPS support, proceeded to seek funding for a new Gateway Visitor Center -- a facility that would be owned by NPS and serve as the visitor center for INHP and for the city and surrounding region as well.

### **The Partnership**

Consistent with its genesis, the development and operation of the GVC will reflect the partnership between the National Park Service and other city and regional stakeholders, the latter represented by the recently established Gateway Visitor Center Corporation (GVCC). As noted above, GVCC is a nonprofit, Section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation created solely for the purposes of working with the National Park Service to develop and operate the GVC. Its board of directors consists of the following members:

- Edward G. Rendell, mayor of Philadelphia
- Maria Keating Titelman, deputy chief of staff to Governor Ridge
- Thomas Donovan (chair), retired vice chair of Mellon Bank and chair of the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC)
- Donald Kimelman, director of the Venture Fund, The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Meryl Levitz, president of GPTMC.

Three additional board members will be elected shortly, representing a national perspective, such as a renown historian specializing in 18th century America. NPS works closely with the GVCC board. Representatives of the Park Service attend each meeting as nonvoting participants, and they will continue to do so in the future.

The design, construction, and operation of the center will be governed by partnership agreements between NPS and GVCC. In essence, NPS will have the right to approve of all aspects of the facility's design and to assure that the construction conforms to the approved design. Once completed, the GVC will be donated to NPS. The facility will be operated and managed jointly on a long-term basis by the GVCC and NPS. An operating partnership agreement will define the relationship between NPS and GVCC on a number of items of particular concern to both parties, such as ongoing liaison between the GVCC and the park, content of GVC exhibits, ticketing for Independence Hall, the presence and role of park staff in the GVC, and the management and oversight of first amendment activities in or near the GVC. In addition, the agreement will set forth policies for addressing such matters as the sale of merchandise, the rental of GVC space, the display and content of written materials, and the maintenance of the facility.

## Gateway Visitor Center

In furtherance of the joint vision of NPS and GVCC, the Gateway Visitor Center is intended as the region's primary point of visitor orientation by providing a range of quality services and programs. Without overshadowing INHP's remarkable buildings as well as other nearby treasures, the center would be an attraction in its own right. It would offer visitors an exciting, informative experience before they set off to encounter the park, the city and the region. A theme of heritage would help integrate the services and programs of the center and its surroundings. There would also be an emphasis on the virtues of modern Philadelphia, including the world-class museums, theaters and other cultural and leisure-time amenities.

Through personal services, exhibits and displays, visitors will gain a contextual understanding of the park and its surroundings, and will be motivated to develop personal itineraries that take advantage of a variety of resources available throughout the city and region. Visitors will also be able to gain information and tickets to tours, attractions and events in the area; make reservations for accommodations, restaurants and transportation; purchase items at a book and gift store; see informative and exciting films about the creation of our nation and about the attractions of Philadelphia and the surrounding region; and have a light meal. The GVC will also be the distribution site for free tickets for admission to Independence Hall during peak periods.

As currently envisioned, the GVC will consist of about 50,000 square feet and be located on the center block of Independence Mall. As noted above, the NPS general management plan calls for a comprehensive effort to revitalize the mall, with the GVC serving as a catalytic and key component. The first phase of this revitalization initiative consists of a new and improved pavilion for the Liberty Bell; a renovated and enhanced underground parking garage; the GVC; and rejuvenation of the mall itself with a lovely outdoor cafe, kiosks, formal and informal seating areas and gathering spaces, and a park setting for viewing Independence Hall or simply playing and relaxing. Subsequent phases include a new facility focused on the Constitution and an institute to provide a structured educational experience primarily for school children.

**Funding Development.** The projected cost of the GVC is \$30 million, consisting of \$24 million for development of the building and interior exhibits and furnishings, and \$6 million for an endowment to help support operations. This funding has been fully committed from non-federal sources as follows:

- The Pew Charitable Trusts \$10.0 million
- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania \$10.0 million
- The City of Philadelphia 5.0 million
- The Annenberg Foundation 2.7 million
- The Connelly Foundation 2.0 million
- The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation .3 million

**Operations.** Once completed the GVC's annual operations will be supported through revenue generating activities, endowment income, and various stakeholder contributions. As described in the NPS testimony earlier this morning, an appropriate, fair share contribution from NPS will be required to help cover the GVC's maintenance and operating costs.

## The Need for H.R. 4109

The timely enactment of H.R. 4109 is essential to the realization of the regional gateway mission of the

center. In essence, the bill under consideration this morning will:

- Allow the GVC to provide information and orientation services that extend beyond the bounds of INHP. For example, under H.R. 4109, the GVC will be able to distribute information and tickets about attractions throughout the city and the surrounding region. And in the proposed store, it would be permitted to sell high quality educational merchandise relating to the greater Philadelphia region.
- Allow the GVC to engage in various revenue-generating activities -- consistent with its regional mission and subject to the approval of the NPS -- in order to help support center operations. For example, H.R. 4109 will permit the GVC to operate a cafe, rent the center for conferences and receptions, and charge fees for making hotel reservations and securing tickets for attractions outside of the park boundaries.
- Finally and related to the preceding item, H.R. 4109, will allow the revenues generated by the GVC's facilities and services to be used to help pay for the costs of operating the center.

Time is also of the essence, and enactment this year of H.R. 4109 is critical. The Pew Charitable Trusts and other private philanthropies, the City of Philadelphia, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania committed their funds towards the development of a regional gateway center, a facility that would provide orientation and information about INHP and the city and region. The inability to achieve this vision -- through the failure to enact H.R. 4109 this year -- would, at a minimum, most likely result in serious delays, jeopardizing the project and the substantial achievement of the Park Service's plans for Independence Mall.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I cannot impress upon you enough the importance of H.R. 4109 to fulfillment of the vision.

Thank you.

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